

Ottawa deserves a say in Greenbelt plans

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Body

It should come as no surprise to Premier Doug Ford that federal Minister of the Environment Steven Guilbeault is taking an interest in the Ontario government's push to open parts of the Greenbelt for development.

Responding to questions from the Narwhal last month, Guilbeault said he is worried about what's happening with the Greenbelt and that developing Greenbelt land "flies in the face of everything we're trying to do in terms of being better prepared for the impacts of climate change."

The Ontario government has made sweeping legislative changes under the guise of "building more homes faster." Despite the advice of its own Housing Affordability Task Force, which reported there is more than enough land to build on, already zoned and ready for development, the provincial government has removed significant parcels of land from the Greenbelt.

Ford and his gang seem to have forgotten that their federal counterparts might object to their plans. The largest parcel of land removed from the Greenbelt comes from the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve, which is adjacent to Rouge Urban National Park.

As reported in the Toronto Star in December, Parks Canada warned that removing this preserve from the Greenbelt could cause "irreversible harm to wildlife, natural ecosystems and agricultural landscapes" of Rouge National Park and affect the habitats of dozens of endangered species. They added that the province had not consulted with the federal government which was required as part of an earlier agreement.

In spite of this, Guilbeault's director of communications, Oliver Anderson, said: "The minister has always maintained we can achieve the best results if we work together. Our government looks forward to continued collaboration with counterparts in Ontario on a range of files ... (including) the protection of nature, and fighting climate change."

We need to prepare for the impacts of climate change. We also need to build more affordable housing. Ford has said that he is disappointed that Guilbeault could intervene with the province's plans to build on the Greenbelt.

But it is Ford's insistence that "this is our jurisdiction" and "we're building homes on those pieces of property, sure as I'm standing here today" that is disappointing.

Ottawa deserves a say in Greenbelt plans

Climate change does not respect jurisdictions and species at risk are not limited to one side of the road. All levels of government need to work together, as Guilbeault seems willing to do, to prepare for the impacts of climate change. We can build affordable homes that further our climate goals, while protecting natural areas that help to mitigate the effects of a changing climate.

But we need a premier who is willing to respond to these challenges, not with defensiveness and defiance, but with a willingness to collaborate, to listen and to lead.

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